

## Super Bowl Betting Sets Records

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For the first time, last week's Super Bowl was played in a state with legal sports betting. By Monday morning, the top-sheet statistics for the gaming industry were staggering. The American Gaming Association estimated that 50.4 million Americans would wager \$16 billion on this year's Super Bowl, double last year's estimate.

One popular sports betting site reported taking 50,000 bets per second at its peak. GeoComply, a company that verifies the locations where gamblers bet, identified 100 million sports-betting transactions over Super Bowl weekend. That was a twenty-five percent increase from last year. Bets were not just placed on prospective winners and losers. Bets were even placed on the color of Gatorade that would be poured on the winning coach (purple was the winning color if you were wondering).

These statistics demonstrate the normalization of gambling in our country. Gambling is nothing new; however, it was once considered socially unacceptable. It conjured images of dark allies, the lascivious atmosphere of Las Vegas, and mafia types. Now, gambling can easily take place with a few swipes across our cell phones from the comfort of our living rooms.

Once shunned by the sporting establishment, today, gambling companies are welcomed advertisers by teams and networks. Sports betting appears harmless and part of the fan experience. Is there anything wrong with placing a bet, pulling the arm of a slot machine, or buying a cheap lottery ticket? Let's notice some helpful Biblical principles that deal with the subject of gambling.

### Acquiring Goods

To deal with the subject of gambling, we first need to identify Biblically acceptable ways of acquiring goods, money, and or wealth. The Bible demonstrates three ways of gaining goods.

**1. Legitimate business.** The Bible teaches that we are to engage in legitimate business to receive money. We work for a wage. An honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

**2 Thessalonians 3:10:** "For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat."

**Ephesians 4:28:** "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."

**2. Exchange/Trade.** Sometimes we acquire goods by exchanging and trading. We negotiate and make a deal. This was a common method of doing business in the ancient world. When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to get food for their families, they traded livestock.

**Genesis 47:16-17:** "And Joseph answered, "Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. He supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year."

**3. Gift.** In the Bible, people received gifts. Property was often transferred by inheritance. Abimelech gave Abraham a sizeable gift of animals following a disagreement (Gen. 20:14). Joseph and Mary received gifts for their Son, Jesus at His birth (Matt. 2:11). Eternal life is even described as a gift and inheritance (John 3:16; Gal. 5:21).

### **The Problems with Gambling**

Gambling is defined as, "playing any game of chance for money or other stakes; to stake or risk money, or anything of value, on the outcome of something involving chance; to lose or squander by betting" (Dictionary.com). Gambling does not fall into any of these three ways of acquiring goods. But, there are other problems with gambling.

**1. Gambling is motivated by covetousness.** Not falling into a legitimate way to earn or receive money may be part of the appeal of gambling for some people. Some people view gambling as a way to "beat the system." Others may hope to get something for nothing. All gamblers are motivated by money. Paul warned, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

**2. Gambling can be addictive.** Several years ago, gambling was legalized in Ohio where we were living. A large casino opened in Cleveland. As soon as the casino opened, commercials started airing on TV, radio, and billboards for help with gambling addiction. The slogan of the ad campaign was, "*It's not your character. It's your chemistry.*"

Addictive behavior is destructive. Addiction will cause a person to do horrible things to feed their addiction. Gambling addiction has caused people to ruin their families financially. Unpayable gambling debts to bookies have led to physical harm and even death.

Peter warned against following the empty promises of false teachers. While he was not writing about gambling, his warning resonates with the danger of addiction: "For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved" (2 Pet. 2:18-19).

**3. Gambling violates the Golden Rule.** Jesus commanded, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). We cannot follow this teaching when we seek to take money away from someone. Gamblers twist Jesus’ words. The gambler’s golden rule is “Do unto others before they do unto you.” This is sinful.

### **Conclusion**

Gambling in our country represents another sin that has been rebranded. Gambling is presented as harmless and fun. *It’s only a few dollars. Everyone does it. You could win money to help put your kids through college.* What we call rebranding, the Bible calls deception. Do not be deceived.